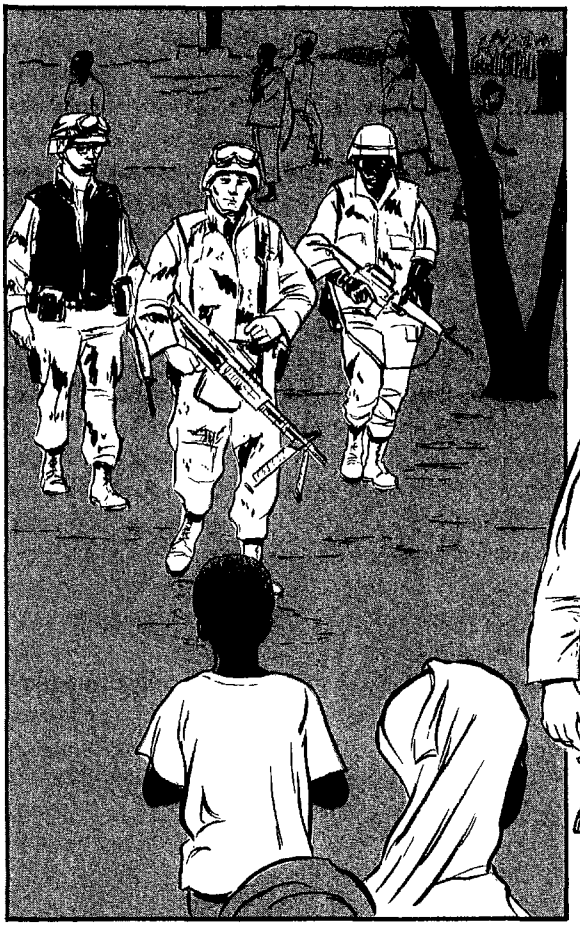
PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS IN SOMALIA



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Peacekeeping operations are the colonial wars of our time—the "savage wars of peace" described by Rudyard Kipling. When I first stood in the Mogadishu seaport and looked up at the city, I expected the Italian colonial governor to appear to welcome us to his province.

In the colonial wars of the 19th century, European armies were able to overwhelm far more numerous native levies because of superior organization and more advanced weapons, particularly the British Maxim gun. The Maxim guns of today are the armored and other heavy forces, including attack helicopters—that modern American and Western European armies possess but that local militias of the Third World typically do not.

As the Rangers demonstrated in Mogadishu, Somalia, in October 1993, even elite light infantry forces may meet considerable resistance from irregular forces. By contrast, Bradley fighting vehicles and tanks were feared by the Somalis, who never seriously engaged them and often fled from them. Although the locals understood these tracked vehicles, they were in a situation analogous to that of the Indians of Central and South America in the early 1500s, who had no weapons that could counter those of the Spanish conquistadors. Even when the Somalis had antiarmor weapons—such as the disassembled MILAN missile we discovered in the oil refinery on the United Nations Road—they were unable to overcome their fear enough to attempt to use them.

The armored forces of our task force and other United Nations contingents were the undisputed masters of the city streets. They provided the "credible military response" that the Somalis respected and feared. Although the militia violence never entirely abated, as evidenced by the frequent attacks of lone gunmen or small bands on our checkpoints, their scale was greatly reduced. Still, the the natives' fear of armored forces cannot always be assumed in future peacekeeping missions.

During my unit's deployment to Somalia in late 1993 and early 1994, in which I served as a mechanized infantry platoon leader, I noted several areas in which our units could improve their preparations for such missions.

Security and Civil Affairs

U.S. forces are likely to encounter few "secure areas" in the peacekeeping environments of the future. In Somalia, our only secure areas were the fortified bases—Victory, Sword, and Hunter—and the University-Embassy Compound.

None of the countryside was ever "secured," and this was where the units of our task force bivouacked for several weeks in November while awaiting the construction of Victory Base. Throughout the deployment, companies of the task force practiced the downed aircraft rescue drill in unsecured areas, and on at least one occasion had to clear itinerant Somalis out of the training area.

Civil affairs (CA) proved of questionable value in Somalia. On several occasions CA personnel quickly and effectively dispersed demonstrators, but in the long run, their methods proved ineffective: They sometimes dispersed people by offering them money for "transit privileges" or for the right to build checkpoints or other facilities on their lands; the unintended end effect was to encourage the Somalis to put forth even larger and more spurious claims.

In one case, for example, I was operating Checkpoint 31 on 21 October Road where an observation tower was built on a small square building standing opposite the old Somali Military Academy. Somalis of a certain family, complete with lawyer, claimed the small building was a mausoleum for a revered ancestor. I had previously learned from the Pakistanis, who had been operating the checkpoint for more than a year, that the building was a boot store attached to the academy when they arrived.

Such problems got out of control because the CA personnel had no direct interest in the locales where they went to deal with Somalis. The personnel operated out of one or the other of the secure bases and were dispatched on an ad hoc basis to the checkpoints where disturbances were reported. As a result, they never had to contend with the results of their actions the next day or the next week, and they failed to understand the connection between the *baksheesh* they paid one day and the riot at the same location two days later. Instead of accomplishing their mission of "minimizing civilian interference with U.S. military operations," they often unknowingly—and wholly unintentionally—contributed to the problem.

A possible solution would be to assign CA personnel as "case officers" for particular locales or groups. In this way, the CA personnel would become familiar with the local problems and people and would see the cause-and-effect relationships between events.

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In some cases, my company conducted its own civil affairs program. At the checkpoint between the airport and the seaport, for example, the company operated a "community relations" program with the local village of clanless Somalis. Our platoon medics provided aid for the villagers, and platoon leaders took severe cases to the battalion doctor at the nearby Pakistani compound. We paid the men (with food and bottled water) for filling sandbags and keeping their children away from the concertina wire. We also we made it easier for the villagers to move through the area to the ocean for washing and to the Pakistani compound where many of them worked. At this checkpoint, we enjoyed excellent relations with the villagers and never faced a rioting mob or a false claim for land-use damages.

Force Integration

Field Manual (FM) 7-98, *Operations in a Low-Intensity Conflict,* says that "light infantry forces, with minimal augmentation, are organized, equipped, trained, and suited for the conduct of [peacekeeping operations]," and the peacekeeping force must be strong enough to "defend itself and set up a visible presence" and "concentrate forces in response to a local theater."

The case of Somalia shows, however, that in a mission environment where there is a constant threat to friendly forces—even a low-level threat—light infantry forces alone often lack the ability to protect themselves and other units. As the following examples demonstrate, a mix of light and mechanized forces from the very beginning is the best force structure to accomplish most peacekeeping missions.

I was involved in one operation with combined heavy and light forces that was planned but not executed. The mission was to cordon and search a compound north of Sword Base that we suspected was being used by Somali snipers. In this operation, a mechanized infantry company team was to form the cordon, and two companies of light infantry, each with one Bradley section attached, were to conduct the search. This would have enabled each type to make the most of its capabilities: The mechanized company had the speed to sweep down on the compound and create a cordon before any of the Somalis could react, while the light companies had the personnel and the experience in military operations on urban terrain (MOUT) to search the compound. The Bradley sections attached to each light company could provide direct fire support and would also be capable of flattening the compound's walls and buildings for immediate breaching.

Joint training for missions of this type from brigade level down would have given both mechanized and light infantry commanders a better grasp of their counterparts' capabilities and limitations. On one occasion, the quick reaction company (QRC), a mechanized unit, was alerted for a mission near Sword Base. The enemy threat was a lone Somali sniper who was already being engaged by a U.S. sniper team on site. Although mechanized forces were not suited to this kind of mission, the QRC was scrambled and nearly rolled out. It would have helped if light and mechanized forces had not been segregated in separate bases. (All mechanized forces operated out of Victory Base, while the light infantry operated from Sword and Hunter.)

A mix of light and heavy forces improves a task force's abilities if all the commanders fully understand the others' capabilities and limitations. The Bradleys have unique abilities the light forces lack, and vice versa.

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vehicles can move rapidly through most roadblocks and other obstacles that would delay or block truck movement. In addition, the Bradleys carry their own large allotments of concertina, barbed wire, and materials for overhead cover; a Bradley platoon or company can occupy a location and fortify itself in a matter of hours. The M88 recovery vehicle is ideal for clearing fields of fire in terrain dominated by low scrub and small trees. Bradley fighting positions can be dug while the vehicles themselves pull security, preferably behind anti-RPG screens and concertina wire. Aside from digging Bradley fighting positions, little engineer support is required.

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Light infantry has its own advantages. Many light units train extensively for MOUT and foot patrolling, skills that are not often emphasized in mechanized infantry units. Light companies are normally much larger than mechanized companies, typically having 130 soldiers instead of 100 or 110. This numerical advantage is even greater, considering the need to retain the Bradley crews—38 soldiers, excluding senior leaders—in or near the vehicle. Light forces also have far smaller support requirements, while mechanized units must dedicate a large number of personnel to maintenance, and they consume far more logistical assets.

Tanks in Somalia also offered certain advantages and disadvantages. They were useful in dispersing mobs, because the Somalis feared the heat of the gas turbine engines. The mine plows mounted on some tanks (though not used to clear mines in Somalia) had a tremendous psychological effect on the people. In the downed aircraft rescue drill, we always planned to lead with tanks because of their armor protection.

One problem with tanks in Mogadishu was that many of those in our task force had only two or three crewmen, which prevented them from effectively dismounting personnel for checkpoint operations. Even when they did dismount, their organic crew-served weapons were unsuitable, and they had to borrow M249 machineguns from the infantry for guard-tower duty.

In addition, the main guns of the M1A1s could not be superelevated to counter threats from upper stories of buildings. We solved this problem by covering the tanks with a section of Bradleys, using the excellent elevation of the 25mm chain guns.

In convoy operations, speed was stressed. Routes were normally familiar, and the crews were carefully trained to look for signs of mining and other hostile activity. When confronted by mobs or other possibly hostile personnel, we traversed our guns onto them. Although we never fired on such groups, the intimidating effect of looking down a succession of Bradley or tank barrels at close range often dispersed them. Since we remained on frequently travelled routes, the Somalis had little time to lay mines on them. On the two occasions when we did discover mines in our path, we found that they had been hastily laid and were easily removed.

In all peacekeeping operations where there is a threat to U.S. Forces, the superior mobility, optics, and firepower of responsive air cover are essential. Our task force found the OH-58 and AH-1 Cobra helicopter teams quite responsive. The pilots were familiar with operating on our FM radio nets and usually gave excellent situation reports. The Air Force's AC-130 Spectre gunships also provided excellent support. Their infrared searchlights permitted rapid visual searches of large areas, such as the fields of fire and the bush areas immediately outside the bases.

Every time we practiced the downed aircraft rescue drill, we trained with the attack and observation helicopters. In one case, an AH-1 landed in our training area, and the crew provided hands-on training for my company. This training included blowing the canopy off the helicopter, safing the weapons, and using the correct lift points to move the fuselage. It would have helped if this type of close training had been conducted between the light and mechanized infantry as well.

Since U.S. Army policy is to avoid dedicating particular units to a peacekeeping role, we can instead expect ad hoc task organizations to be used in future peacekeeping operations. To prevent a recurrence of the difficulties we experienced in Somalia, more joint training exercises between mechanized and light infantry should be conducted back home. Deployments to the Joint Readiness Training Center could easily be configured to replicate peacekeeping operations in different contingency areas around the world. In this way, the Army could maintain the training focus on warfighting while also achieving valuable cross-training and preparation for possible peace operations.

Political Considerations

Although few political decisions regarding military operations have an immediate and direct effect on platoon and company level operations, such decisions did affect us in two areas:

First, because of the political cost of even a few civilian casualties, all indirect fires, even smoke and illumination missions by 60mm mortars, had to be cleared by the joint task force. Getting the fires therefore took half an hour or more, by which time the situation could have completely changed.

Conditions in each peacekeeping mission will be different, but the focus on preventing civilian casualties is likely to continue, for obvious reasons. Even in Somalia, however, we always prepared fire support plans. In the event of another firefight like the one on 3 October, we expected that the rules of engagement would become more expansive for the enemy.

Second, we sometimes encountered difficulty in clearing

fields of fire around our checkpoints and guard positions. We could not remove brush because of possible violations of Somali land rights. We had to send requests for land clearance to the joint task force, just as we did for indirect fire, and these requests were normally disapproved. For this reason, our fields of fire often extended no more than 50 meters, and the possibility of a lone gunman crawling up through the brush concerned us greatly. At Checkpoint 31,

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our fields of fire were no more than 100 meters wide, and we received sniper fire from little more than that distance on several occasions.

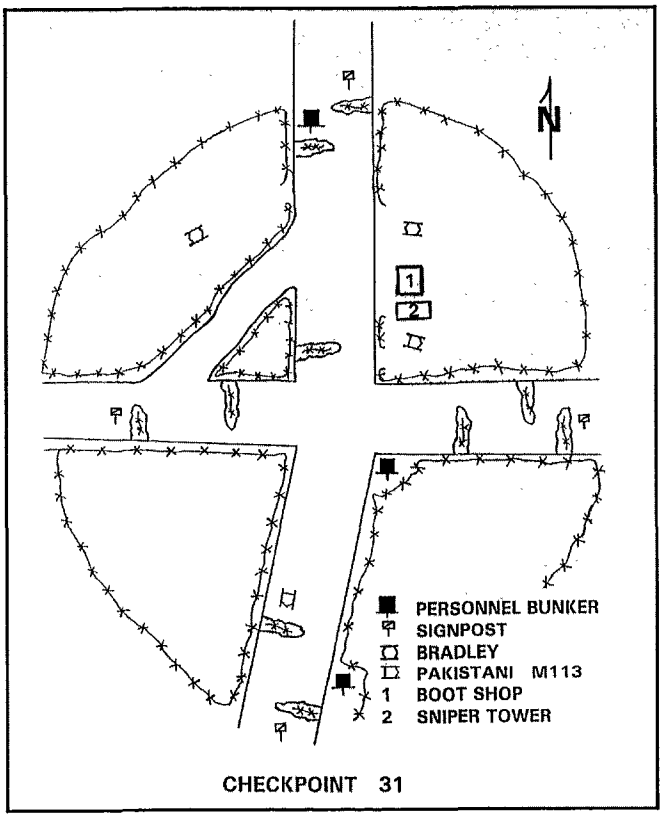
Because of these twin restrictions, direct-fire weapons and enhanced optics can be expected to assume greater importance in peacekeeping missions. In an environment where indirect fire is severely restricted, the firepower provided by mechanized infantry, tanks, and tactical air support is likely to be the foot soldier's greatest support. Enhanced optical systems such as the AN/TAS-5 and the AN/UAS-11 thermal viewers, Bradley and tank thermal sights, the helicopters' forward looking infrared (FLIR), and the AN/PAQ-4 designator will also assume greater roles in peacekeeping missions. Even in brush or built-up areas, the positive identification of targets is critical.

Intelligence

Operations in Somalia demonstrated that the intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) guidance found in FM 7-98, *Operations in A Low-intensity Conflict,* is sometimes of limited usefulness. Throughout the deployment, human intelligence (HUMINT) was the major element of the IPB process. Although HUMINT provided data for a variety of overlays showing past and projected enemy activity, the enemy usually acted in an unexpected and unpredictable manner.

HUMINT in Somalia was often accurate concerning locations and objects but extremely unreliable in predicting events. The task force S-2 pinpointed numerous arms caches and suspected mortar points and militia strongpoints; some of the Somali contractors hired to help build Victory Base freely discussed with the gate guards the locations of recoilless rifles and other heavy weapons buried by the militias. Although no action was taken on this information because of constraints placed on us by the mission, independent confirmation verified its accuracy.

Almost every day, however, we were warned of imminent attacks that never materialized. In Somalia, the enemy was a completely decentralized force of bandits, drawn from disparate clans and operating seemingly independently of any command structure. In many cases, lone Somalis (often



CHECKPOINT 31

high on the drug khat) were responsible for attacks on task force personnel. Much of the adult male population of Mogadishu was under the influence of the drug during daylight hours, and nearly all of them had rifles. It was therefore impossible to predict the number of Somalis who might attack U.S. forces while suffering from hallucinations and paranoia. The task force could expect an average of one or two attacks a day, but there was no way to predict when or where they would occur.

Checkpoints

Although the establishment of checkpoints and observation points is a major part of a peacekeeping mission, so far as I know, there is no published standard for checkpoint operations. Although I do not claim to have a fully developed concept that covers all contingencies, I found the following techniques to be effective:

We often operated as sections, meaning that platoon sergeants and senior section sergeants were the key leaders operating independently at isolated checkpoints or in conjunction with other United Nations forces. Senior NCOs must therefore have, in addition to superior tactical sense, the ability to exercise judgment and discretion in dealing with representatives of other nations' armies.

In checkpoint operations, we were not normally tasked to conduct extensive personnel searches. We searched all motor vehicles and conducted random searches of the innumerable donkey carts, generally following the methods discussed in Appendix G, FM 90-8, *Counterguerrilla Operations.* When we guarded the gate of Victory Base, we

used portable metal detector wands to search Somali nationals, which made these searches much faster.

In constructing the checkpoint, however, we modified the schematic described in Appendix G. Instead of building a checkpoint in the road with obstacles, the engineers built speed bumps and barricades stretching from the shoulders to the center line on alternating sides of the road. These barricades and speed bumps forced approaching vehicles to slow and provided protection against drive-by shootings. These barricades incorporated industrial metal (including girders from gutted warehouses and armor plates from vehicles destroyed during the Somali civil war), and these were surrounded by concertina wire. In addition to being quite intimidating to Somali drivers, the barricades also provided suitable cover for soldiers who might come under fire while searching vehicles.

Vehicles and donkey carts could pass through the checkpoint itself, where they were subject to searches, but we did not generally permit the local Somalis to walk through. They had to walk around the checkpoint perimeter wire, as did herds of camels and goats. This reduced the workload for the searching personnel and also increased security. In spite of the signs we erected at checkpoint perimeters, the locals continually tested our enforcement of them; every morning, we had to be firm in directing the first pedestrians around the outer wire so they would understand that the policy would be enforced.

Because of restrictions imposed by the rules of engagement, the key dismount weapon was generally the M24 sniper rifle instead of the M60 machinegun, and the primary response to any hostile activity was the sniper team. It is therefore critical to find or build sniper towers or other positions from which the company sniper can observe the surrounding area. If the fields of fire are cleared and the position is well secured by other members of the platoon, the sniper tower need not be concealed, though this is preferable.

Battle Drills

Two of the battle drills in FM 7-7J, *Mechanized Infantry Platoon and Squad (Bradley),* need to be revised to reflect the experiences of the battalion's soldiers in Somalia:

Battle Drill #2, *React to contact,* requires that once all personnel and vehicles are covered and returning effective fire, the leader must determine whether to execute an attack or break contact. In the peacekeeping context, a platoon may be required to occupy a specific location or checkpoint that it is not permitted to leave, either to attack or to break contact.

If the entire platoon is occupying the checkpoint, one section may displace to maneuver on the enemy while the other provides overwatch. If only one section is on duty, the two Bradleys may maneuver on the enemy if the checkpoint is small enough that the section's dismounted soldiers can maintain security alone for a brief period. In this case, however, the dismount element must be provided with secure radio communications and enough cover to repel any assault that may develop while the vehicles are engaging the original threat. In no case should the vehicles move so far from the checkpoint that they cannot provide immediate support for the dismount element in case it comes under attack.

Battle Drill #5, *Enter building/Clear room or building,* needs some modification for a peacekeeping environment. In the case of clearing operations, the doctrinally preferred method of clearing the first room of the building is with a tank main gun round, direct-fire artillery shell, or antitank missile, but this is likely to collapse the entire structure or set it on fire. Due to the requirement to use minimal force, these preferred methods may not even be permitted. In Somalia, we encountered buildings made primarily of stucco, cinder block, and poured concrete construction, especially warehouses. Similar building styles may be expected in other contingency areas.

To prevent a recurrence of the difficulties we experienced in Somalia, more joint training exercises between mechanized and light infantry should be conducted back home.

In summary, future peacekeeping operations should consider the following points:

- Civil affairs operations would be much more effective if case workers were assigned to particular locales or clans.
- The peacekeeping task force should include both light and heavy forces from the beginning, and its units should practice joint operations throughout the deployment.
- Since political considerations may rule out the use of indirect-fire weapons, the emphasis should be on direct-fire weapons and superior optics.
- HUMINT should be carefully weighed and, where possible, verified by other sources. Other forms of intelligence, such as aerial photography, are preferable.
- Checkpoint operations will be a major part of the mission. For the security of personnel manning the checkpoint, barricades and speed bumps should always be integrated into the design, and foot traffic should be prohibited.

Peacekeeping will be one of the most challenging tasks to face the soldiers of Infantry Force XXI, but with the proper training and equipment our deployed forces will be able to successfully accomplish even this demanding, high-visibility mission. Success in this crucial area will enable our nation and her allies to provide the credible deterrence and stability that will define the course of events in the next century.

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